

TECHNOLOGY AND DISABILITY POLICY HIGHLIGHTS – FEBRUARY 2021

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OVERVIEW

In February, the annual African American Conference on Disabilities (AACD) was virtual, free, and lasted throughout February. Britney Wilson, a graduate of Howard University and the University of Pennsylvania Law School and a Black woman born with Cerebral Palsy, gave the opening speech. She discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates why disability, and especially at the intersection of race and disability, has always been and always will be a social justice issue that deserves more public attention. The hashtag #BlackDisabledHistoryMonth trended on Twitter as advocates and civil rights organizations, such as the NAACP, celebrated the amazing work that Black Americans with disabilities have contributed to American culture and society. The hashtag produced stories of many famous Black Americans with invisible disabilities and visible disabilities alike. To highlight a few of the mentioned individuals, Halle Berry, an actress with 80% hearing loss in one ear; Harry Belafonte, actor, and civil rights activist, has dyslexia; and Amanda Gorman, the young poet laureate who spoke at Biden's inauguration, has an audio processing disorder. These few stories highlight the need to continue to honor, acknowledge, and bring awareness to the amazing contributions that Black Americans with disabilities have added to society.

In regulatory news, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) approved several regulations aimed at connectivity and equipment access expansion. These included a subsidy for low-income households for broadband services and digital devices via the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program, the renewal of the National Deaf-Blind equipment distribution program, and increased 2.5 GHz band licenses for rural Tribal communities. This month, the FCC also acknowledged the 25th Anniversary of the Telecom Act with a commemorative video, press release statement, and Twitter chat that can be viewed with the hashtag #TelecomActChat.

The Wireless RERC is currently seeking research participants with sensory disabilities from the Metro Atlanta area to participate in a study investigating the accessibility of emergency alerting signals. Also, researchers at the Georgia Institute of Technology seek people **with** disabilities and people **without** disabilities who work in nontraditional jobs to help improve the reliability of a new survey: The Contingent Employment Participation Survey (CEPS). If you are interested in participating in either of these studies, please email salimah@cacp.gatech.edu.

This issue also includes news about accessible COVID-19 testing, home automation, hands-free interfaces, artificial intelligence, mental health, language development, and more.

REGULATORY ACTIVITIES

NATIONAL DEAF-BLIND EQUIPMENT DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM

February 2021 – The FCC's National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program, also known as iCanConnect, provides the equipment needed to make telecommunications, advanced communications, and the internet accessible to low-income individuals who are deaf-blind or have both significant vision loss and significant hearing loss. The program serves eligible residents of all 50 states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In addition, assessments of accessibility needs, equipment installation, training, and other technical support are available. Applicants must verify their income, i.e., not more than 400% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, and disability. Documentation of disability status must be in writing and from a community service provider, educator, healthcare provider, vision or hearing professional, vocational rehabilitation counselor, or a medical or health professional. The equipment provided may be mainstream or specialized hardware, software, or applications, depending on access needs. Examples of equipment range from laptops to screen magnification and reading software, widescreen monitors, braille note takers, tablets, smartphones, and specialized keyboards. Equipment warranties, maintenance, and repairs may also be provided.

To find the NDBEDP certified program in your state, go to icanconnect.org/states or call 1-800-825-4595. You can also send an email to dro@fcc.gov or call the FCC via voice on 1-888-225-5322 or videophone on 1-844-432-2275. [Source: FCC]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program](#)

<https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/national-deaf-blind-equipment-distribution-program>

FCC'S EMERGENCY BROADBAND BENEFIT PROGRAM

February 25, 2021 — The FCC unanimously voted for an immediate subsidy for low-income households to receive high-speed internet via a Report and Order [**WC Docket No. 20-445**] that adopting the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program (EBBP). The program is a \$3.2 billion federal initiative to reduce the digital divide, especially as the pandemic requires virtual interactions. This new regulation will provide up to \$50 a month to low-income households and up to \$75 a month to households on tribal land for broadband service. The FCC's subsidy will also provide a one-time subsidy of up to \$100 towards purchasing a computer or tablet. The FCC aims to roll-out this program within the next 60 days, but they must first coordinate the logistics, such as identifying internet service providers to participate in the EBBP and a system to register, approve, and track recipients of these funds. The digital divide is one of the most pressing issues of our time as at least 14.5 million Americans do not

have broadband. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this gap, as many public and private services, including schools and healthcare, have limited to no offering of in-person alternatives. Acting FCC Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel hopes that this program “will help those at risk of digital disconnection.” Eligible recipients include, but are not limited to, families who have children that receive free or reduced school lunch, Pell grant recipients, and individuals who have lost jobs or had reduced income over the last year. [Source: FCC]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[FCC Adopts Report and Order for Emergency Broadband Benefit Program](https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-adopts-report-and-order-emergency-broadband-benefit-program-0)

<https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-adopts-report-and-order-emergency-broadband-benefit-program-0>

[Emergency Broadband Benefit Program February Open Meeting Presentation](https://www.fcc.gov/document/emergency-broadband-benefit-program-february-open-meeting-presentation)

<https://www.fcc.gov/document/emergency-broadband-benefit-program-february-open-meeting-presentation>

WIRELESS TELECOMMUNICATIONS BUREAU APPROVES MORE INTERNET LICENSES

February 24, 2021 — The FCC’s Wireless Telecommunications Bureau approved an additional 21 spectrum licenses in the 2.5 GHz band range for rural Tribal communities across the country. Acting Chairwoman Rosenworcel shared that tribal communities in New Mexico and Arizona are already using “this part of our wireless spectrum provides the only reliable high-speed wireless signal available in their communities.” As it is an effective existing model, Acting Chairwoman Rosenworcel suggests that it is a practical way to increase connectivity for Tribal communities. To date, the FCC has granted 205 licenses in the 2.5 GHz band to close the digital divide experienced by residents in rural Tribal communities. [Source: FCC]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[FCC Grants Additional Rural Tribal Spectrum Licenses](https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-grants-additional-rural-tribal-spectrum-licenses)

<https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-grants-additional-rural-tribal-spectrum-licenses>

BROADBAND DATA TASKFORCE FOCUSES ON IMPROVING BROADBAND MAPPING

February 17, 2021 — The FCC’s Acting Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel approved the creation of a Broadband Data Taskforce, charged with implementing improvements to the agency’s broadband data and mapping tools. The primary aim of this initiative is to collect more detailed and precise data about broadband availability across the country. The Broadband Data Task Force is a cross-agency effort. It will encompass the following agencies: Office of Economics and Analytics, Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, Wireline Competition Bureau, Consumer and Governmental Affairs

Bureau, International Bureau, Office of Engineering and Technology, and Office of the Managing Director. [Source: FCC]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

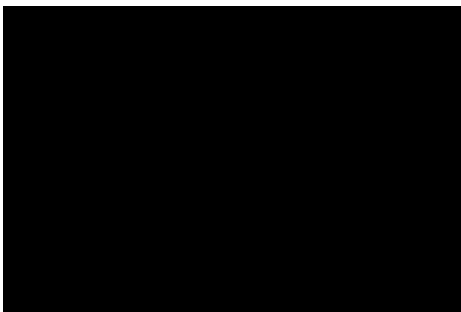
[Rosenworcel Establishes Broadband Data Task Force](#)

<https://www.fcc.gov/document/rosenworcel-establishes-broadband-data-task-force>

TELECOMMUNICATION ACT OF 1996 TURNS 25

February 8, 2021 – The FCC released a statement celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the Telecommunication Act of 1996. The commemorative video began with Acting Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel, noting that “Without the Telecom Act of 1996, today’s information and communications landscape would look entirely different.” Rosenworcel continued to share that “coming at the dawn of the Internet age, the Act accelerated the transition from the analog era to the digital age while also reaffirming the promise at the heart of FCC’s founding statute: that advanced communications should be available to all Americans. Importantly, the Act established the E-Rate program to bring the internet to every classroom and library in America, and, today, the wisdom of investing in digital learning has never been clearer. While we have come a long way, we still have much more work to do to fully realize the promise of the Act and see connectivity for all Americans.” Along those lines, the Telecomm Act includes provisions for communication access by people with disabilities, including Section 255, which directs manufacturers and providers of telecommunication equipment and services to design them to be accessible to people with disabilities, and Section 713, stipulates video programming accessibility for people with hearing, vision and speech disabilities.

The video features thoughts from telecommunication policy leaders. Watch past and present Congressional, Commission, and NTIA leaders discuss the Telecom Act.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Rosenworcel Commemorates 25th Anniversary of the 1996 Telecom Act](#)

<https://www.fcc.gov/document/rosenworcel-commemorates-25th-anniversary-1996-telecom-act>

[Telecom Act 25th Anniversary Video & Twitter Chat](#)

<https://www.fcc.gov/news-events/events/2021/02/telecom-act-25th-anniversary-video-twitter-chat>

WIRELESS RERC NEWS

METRO ATLANTA AREA RESEARCH VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

In research funded by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, faculty at the Georgia Institute of Technology **are seeking participants for a usability study of prototype wireless emergency alert notification signals.** Because people with different types of disabilities aren't always considered in the design of alerting systems, this research seeks feedback from individuals who are blind, have low vision, who are deaf, or hard of hearing. **You will be asked to carry a device that produces alerts for a period of up to two weeks.** During this time, you will acknowledge any alerts you receive by pressing a button on the device. You will receive up to 14 alerts per week, and each alert will only be about 10 seconds long.

Research findings are expected to inform the development of technology and policy solutions to improve WEA messages' timely receipt by people with sensory disabilities.

To be included, you *must*:

- Be 18 years of age or older
- Be deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or have low vision
- Be able to speak and understand English and/or American Sign Language

Each participant will receive a \$40 cash stipend.

If you are interested in participating, please contact Salimah LaForce at salimah@cacp.gatech.edu or 404-839-8741. She will provide more details about the study and schedule your participation.

SURVEY OF USER NEEDS (SUN)

The SUN is the Wireless RERC's cornerstone survey on wireless technology use by people with disabilities. In addition to questions about cell phone and tablet use, this version of the SUN collects information about wearables, "smart" home technologies, and other next-generation wirelessly connected devices. Your responses will:

- Help designers and engineers make more accessible wireless devices, features, and services for people with disabilities, and
- Inform recommendations to better ensure inclusive policies and practices.

If you have a disability, please consider taking this survey. If you know someone who has a disability, please send the survey to them.

Scan the QR code to open the survey on your mobile device, or to take the survey via phone, call 404-839-8741, or **Take the survey online at <http://bit.ly/wRERC-SUN2020>.**



OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST

RESEARCH STUDY ON NONTRADITIONAL EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCES

Researchers at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta seek people **with** disabilities and people **without** disabilities who work in nontraditional jobs to help us improve the reliability of a new survey: The Contingent Employment Participation Survey (CEPS).

The project aims to understand how people with disabilities find and obtain nontraditional work, such as temping, contracting, and freelancing. We also are interested in learning how such jobs affect your everyday life, your expectations for work, and your sense of independence. To know whether these experiences have disability-specific attributes, we are including people without disabilities as a point of comparison. If you are contingently employed, please consider volunteering for this study.

If selected for the study, you will take the CEPS twice. The second time will be two weeks after the first time you take the CEPS. The survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. You will receive \$100 as compensation for your time. To take part in this study, you must be:

- Over 18 years of age.
- Be able to understand and speak English or be an ASL speaker
- Have a disability OR do not have a disability
- Should currently be in and work in the United States at the time of participation. (You may not currently be in or work in an EU country at the time of participation.)
- Have access to a phone or computer
- Work or have recently worked (within the last six months) in a nontraditional job, such as a temp agency, freelance, contract, piecemeal work, or app-based jobs such as Uber.

If you would like to participate in this study, please contact Salimah Laforce salimah@cacp.gatech.edu for more information.

PACIFIC ADA ACCESSIBILITY SUGGESTIONS FOR DRIVE-THROUGH MEDICAL SITES

February 2021 – Drive-through medical sites are one way hospitals and health departments provide COVID-19 testing and vaccinations. Whether these drive-through medical services are funded and/or operated by the state, county, or city, or a private business, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that the services be accessible to people with disabilities. The Pacific ADA Center offers guidelines and strategies to promote accessibility at such drive-through medical sites, including sites where people may be asked to exit their vehicles. First, they recommend involving the disability community in planning and implementation. Centers for Independent Living can offer guidance and support to ensure programs and activities are readily usable by and accessible to people with disabilities.

The Center recommends clear communication strategies, such as ASL interpreters, printed instructions, bold fonts, gestures, and assistive listening devices. Furthermore, a strong WIFI signal would allow individuals to connect their communication devices and other assistive technology. Additional suggestions for greater accessibility include taking accommodation requests during the registration phase and before arrival on site. A television screen at the entry to the site can play a video instructing drivers on where to go and what to do. The video should be in all formats—plain language, with ASL, and captioning.

Beyond the tangible considerations, staff should be trained on disability etiquette. Staff should communicate with the person being tested or vaccinated directly; use plain language, whether spoken or written; and allow extra time, not to rush or interrupt the person they are testing or vaccinating. For people who are blind or have low vision, staff should ask permission to touch the person and let them know when they're reaching out to them and handing them something or giving them a vaccination. Staff can also learn human guide techniques to assist someone from their vehicle to another onsite location, if applicable.

A suggested alternative to onsite treatment is self-administered medical test kits mailed to people who are unable or unwilling to leave their homes or who do not have access to a private vehicle. For more information, refer to the fact-sheet [here](#). [Source: ADA National Network]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Accessibility at Drive-Thru Medical Sites](#)

<https://adata.org/factsheet/accessibility-drive-thru-medical-sites>

AFRICAN AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON DISABILITIES

February 2021 – The annual African American Conference on Disabilities (AACD) was virtual, free, and lasted throughout February. Co-founded by David Carey with Ability360 and Renaldo Fowler with the Arizona Center for Disability Law, AACD is the only comprehensive conference in the United States that addresses the intersection between race and disability. It was open to all individuals, families, and organizations. The conference organizer, ACDL, is a non-profit law firm that assists Arizonians with disabilities in protecting their legal rights to independence, justice, and equality. The conference's goals were to build strong communities, eliminate barriers and create opportunities for persons with disabilities and provide the African American community with cultural and linguistic information and resources. Conference participants had the opportunity to attend three general sessions and select among 24 disability-related workshops.

The opening speech was given by Britney Wilson, a graduate of Howard University and the University of Pennsylvania Law School and a Black woman born with Cerebral Palsy. She has spoken extensively about the intersection of race and disability for outlets including The Nation Magazine, Longreads, The

Huffington Post, Colorlines, and This American Life. She discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates why disability, and especially the intersection of race and disability, has always been and always will be a social justice issue that deserves more public attention.

Aside from the speaker sessions, workshops included "Addressing the Needs of Students with Disabilities during COVID-19 — A Workshop for Parents," "Trauma: The Effects of the Pandemic in African American Families," "Ready to Protest: Techniques and Strategies for Ensuring an Inclusive Environment and Accessibility for People with Disabilities in Social Justice Activities," and "The Role and Impact of Voters with Disabilities and People of Color on the outcome of the 2020 General Election." For more details on the conference, please contact Renaldo Fowler at rfowler@azdisabilitylaw.org. [Source: Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[AFRICAN AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON DISABILITIES](https://addpc.az.gov/events/african-american-conference-disabilities-1)

<https://addpc.az.gov/events/african-american-conference-disabilities-1>

EMERSON INSTALLS AUDIO CUES IN ELEVATORS

February 25, 2021 – More than a year after a student filed an accessibility request to install audio cues in on-campus elevators, which would announce the direction the elevator is moving and the floor it is on, Emerson added the cues to the remaining four buildings on campus without them. Dylan Rossiter, a senior journalism major, filed the request in Fall 2019 after experiencing difficulty navigating the elevators due to his blindness. "It actually created quite a bit of anxiety for me when I would go to classes for the first time or get into a packed elevator, particularly because I wouldn't really be able to push what button, and I wasn't sure what floor I was getting off at."

Along with requesting audio cues to be installed in every elevator on campus, Rossiter included requests for increased font size on signage in the Dining Center and greater accessibility throughout dining services for students with disabilities. Aside from the audio cues, these other requests remain unaddressed. "The fact is also not lost on me that this request was filed in Fall 2019, and we are only now seeing this happen in Spring 2021, which is deeply, deeply concerning," Rossiter said. "It's exhausting and also alienating...you don't feel like you want to be a part of this community because they haven't valued what you have said."

The installation of audio cues follows a history of students on campus pushing for a more accessible campus. Last spring, a push-button was installed at a key building entrance after students advocated for it. Rossiter said the responsibility of Emerson's campus accessibility should not fall to students. "[Emerson] shouldn't be burdening students with making our campus more accessible," Rossiter said. "We should hire somebody whose literal job is to make the campus more accessible. That deep-seated ableism we can't really correct in a semester, we can't correct in a year, but there

are actionable steps that can be taken to create a more accessible community that is simple stuff like audio cues in an elevator or push buttons or increased font signage. These things aren't hard." [Source: Ann E. Matica, The Berkeley Beacon]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Audio cues installed in elevators after student push for campus accessibility](https://berkeleybeacon.com/audio-cues-installed-in-elevators-after-student-push-for-campus-accessibility/)
<https://berkeleybeacon.com/audio-cues-installed-in-elevators-after-student-push-for-campus-accessibility/>

VERMONT DMV ADOPTS DEVICE FOR HARD OF HEARING

February 22, 2021 – The Vermont Department of Motor Vehicles launched the use of a device called UbiDUO 3 at all its locations to enable deaf and hard of hearing customers interact with employers. The UbiDUO 3 has two keyboards facing each other and small screens for each person communicating. What one person types on their keyboard can be seen on the other person's screen immediately. This allows hard-of-hearing people to converse with a hearing person more expediently. A federal grant was used to purchase 11 UbioDuo 3 devices which retail for \$2,695. All counter supervisors have been trained on how to use this device. [Source: Venkat, Assistive Technology Blog]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Vermont dmv is using ubiduo3 for communication between hearing and hard of hearing people](https://assistivetechologyblog.com/2021/02/vermont-dmv-ubiduo3.html)
<https://assistivetechologyblog.com/2021/02/vermont-dmv-ubiduo3.html>

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA LAUNCHES MENTAL HEALTH APP FOR STUDENTS

February 19, 2021 – B Well, a new app created at the University of Alabama, Birmingham, is now available on the App Store and Google Play. The app helps students access mental health resources on their mobile devices and build a self-care plan that encourages healthy habits. Self-care plans are personalized to each student and emphasize wellness-inducing sleep, movement, nutrition, routine, and resiliency. Students can create private habit checklists and wellness journals to monitor their journey. B Well also includes self-help tools that give students access to mental health and mindfulness resources and related campus events.

The idea for B Well originated from the Student Advisory Board. Alice Kim, a senior majoring in psychology and philosophy who also is pursuing a master's degree in public health, saw a Snapchat ad that inspired the idea. "We realized there was such a wealth of mental health resources for students at UAB, but not one centralized location where students can access that information," said Tyler Huang, Undergraduate Student Government Association president. The app's first phase was launched in January, allowing users to create an interactive, personalized self-care plan. After creating a plan, students can track their healthy habits and activities each day, log a mood journal, and consider goals

for the following day. All the information is saved within the app, so students can go back and review their progress. The self-care plan can also be updated at any time. [Source: Jennifer Fortier, WVMTM 13]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[UAB creates mental health app that puts wellness in students' hands](https://www.wvmtm13.com/article/uab-creates-mental-health-app-that-puts-wellness-in-students-hands/35563614#)

<https://www.wvmtm13.com/article/uab-creates-mental-health-app-that-puts-wellness-in-students-hands/35563614#>

HOME AUTOMATION ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY FOR CAREGIVERS

February 18, 2021 – Technology Control Partners (TCP), an Atlanta-based home automation team with partners around the country, announced that they are leveraging their proprietary AutomateMyPlace™ technology to assist caregivers in a variety of roles. TCP recently deployed their Assistive Technology package as a case study, working with a family that wanted to provide the best care possible to their twenty-year-old daughter living with autism. The result was life-changing, with substantial positive feedback relayed back to the team for their supportive work.

TCP specializes in home automation solutions tailored to a loved one's needs, including a controlled and safe environment for people who are elderly, disabled, or undergoing physical rehabilitation. The solutions enable the rest of the family to practice periods of independence while safely monitoring progress and empowering the individual in need of assistance. Package features include smart door locks, video doorbells, cameras, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, smart thermostats, automated lighting controls, and voice activation.

Discussing the launch of AutomateMyPlace™, founder of TCP, Matthew Caro, said, "During the 2020 shutdown, we re-evaluated our strengths and wanted to apply our services to helping others. We have served over 10,000 customers throughout the years and want to use that experience to create lasting change." [Source: PR Underground]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Technology Control Partners Rolls Out AutomateMyPlace™ Assistive Technology for Caregivers Countrywide](https://www.prunderground.com/technology-control-partners-rolls-out-automatemyplace-assistive-technology-for-caregivers-countrywide/00220065/)

<https://www.prunderground.com/technology-control-partners-rolls-out-automatemyplace-assistive-technology-for-caregivers-countrywide/00220065/>

LOUIE VOICE CONTROL COMPANION APP

February 15, 2021 – India. In 1999, Pramit Bhargava took a medicine whose side-effects impacted his retina, causing his vision to decline dramatically. By 2012, he could not read print, leaving him

miserable and unsure of what to do next. Soon, he found himself building “Louie Voice Control,” a voice-based interface for people with visual disabilities.

The inspiration for Louie Voice Control was an Uber ride. One day, a sighted friend was booking a Uber ride for Primit. The friend asked Primit questions and made the appropriate selections in the app. This experience made Primit wonder how empowering it would be if the phone were to read out menu options, accept their verbal responses as inputs and make the booking. With this “aha” moment, Primit got to work.

Louie is an accessibility app and can be used by all, including but not limited to people who have visual and motor disabilities, the elderly, people with limited manual dexterity, and all people who prefer hands-free interactions with technology. Unlike popular voice assistants like Siri or Alexa, Louie aims to provide full voice control of every feature of popular apps. Louie currently supports YouTube, WhatsApp, Uber, Contacts & Phone Calling, with more apps under development. Furthermore, leading voice Assistants or personal assistants often go silent now and then. Louie focuses on continuous two-way continuous interactions – just like human communication.

Louie is in beta and is currently available for free to users who are blind around the world. Primit hopes to get feedback from these early users on what can be improved. Through Louie, he is building a community of users in over 70 countries that are excited to use the app daily. The “early access” version of the app can be downloaded from [Google Playstore](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.louievoicecontrol). [Source: Venkat, Assistive Technology Blog]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Louie voice control is the “companion app” that every visually impaired needs](https://assistivetechologyblog.com/2021/02/louie-voice-control.html)

<https://assistivetechologyblog.com/2021/02/louie-voice-control.html>

NIKE LAUNCHES HANDS-FREE SHOES

February 12, 2021 – Nike launched the GO FlyEase, hands-free slip-on shoes that are easy to put on and take off without bending down to undo or tie up laces, zips, or straps. The design was inspired by Matthew Walzer, who wrote a letter at age 16 to Nike asking for an accessible pair of shoes he could put on and off independently because he has cerebral palsy. He said: “At 16 years old, I was able to completely dress myself, but my parents still had to tie my shoes. As a teenager who was striving to become totally self-sufficient, I found this extremely frustrating, and at times, embarrassing.”

When sending the letter, Matthew never expected a response from Nike: “I knew what I was doing was, in football terms, ‘a Hail Mary,’ and to be quite honest, I had very low expectations.” Matthew got to collaborate with Nike designer, Tobie Hatfield, to create the GO FlyEase, and a few months after sending his letter, Matthew got to test the prototype of the hands-free shoes. “There are not enough ‘thank yous’ in the world to express my undying gratitude,” he adds.

Behind the shoe's design is a "bi-stable hinge" that secures the shoe in fully-open and fully-closed positions. This duality allows another signature feature called the "GO FlyEase tensioner." The tensioner's unique flexibility supercharges an action many might take for granted, like kicking-off of a shoe. These new accessible shoes are also likely to benefit Paralympic athletes, including champion fencer Bebo Vio. "With the Nike Go FlyEase, I just need to put my feet in and jump on it. The shoes are a new kind of technology, not only for adaptive athletes but for everyone's real life," she says.

The Nike GO FlyEase is available initially via invite for select [Nike Members](#) on Monday 15th February 2021, with "broader consumer" availability planned later this year. [Source: Emma Purcell, Disability Horizons]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Nike launches hands-free shoes inspired by man with cerebral palsy](#)

<https://disabilityhorizons.com/2021/02/nike-launches-hands-free-shoes-inspired-by-man-with-cerebral-palsy/>

ASSISTIVE TECH DONATED TO OXFORD CHILDREN'S HOSPICE

February 8, 2021 – The Shanly Foundation, in the United Kingdom, supported Lifelites with £2,000 so it can continue to donate assistive technology for life-limited and disabled children in Oxfordshire and surrounding counties. Lifelites has been donating life-changing packages of inclusive technology for 20 years and supports every children's hospice service across the British Isles. According to Lifelites, these children are particularly isolated and vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic. The life-changing technology enables children using the children's hospice to play with their brothers and sisters, communicate with their parents and control something for themselves. According to Lifelites, for many children, it is the first time they will play with their brothers and sisters and say 'I love you' to their parents.

Toby O'Grady is one of the children who has greatly benefited from Lifelites-donated assistive technology. He is seven years old and has been diagnosed with Dravet Syndrome, a severe life-limiting form of epilepsy. He can't talk and walks with assistance. He has difficulties controlling his body, but he can swipe with his hands and arms. He loves the Lifelites-donated interactive Mobile Magical Carpet, which projects images on the floor that respond to his movements. It enables him to play and control something himself and allows his dad to play and engage with him on his level as well. When Toby visits the hospice, he plays on it all the time.

Simone Enefer-Doy, Chief Executive of Lifelites, said, "I greatly appreciate that the Shanly Foundation recognizes the importance of Lifelites' work to give children with limited lives, unlimited possibilities." [Source: Sarah Sarsby, AT Today]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Interactive assistive tech donated to disabled children at Oxford children's hospice](http://attoday.co.uk/interactive-assistive-tech-donated-to-disabled-children-at-oxford-childrens-hospice/)

<http://attoday.co.uk/interactive-assistive-tech-donated-to-disabled-children-at-oxford-childrens-hospice/>

MICROSOFT INVESTS IN EVINCED, ISRAELI ACCESSIBILITY STARTUP

February 7, 2021 – Founded in 2019, Israeli startup, Evinced, provides accessibility software support during the development stage. It has raised \$19.5 million to date, with \$17 million coming as part of the Series A funding. The investment was led by M12, the Microsoft investment arm, BGV, and Capital One Ventures, with Seed investor Engineering Capital also participating.

The founders of Evinced, Gal Moav, and Navin Thadani, first met while working at Ravello, an Israeli startup that Oracle acquired. Now, the two have collaborated on Evinced. Evinced's technology aims to automatically identify issues with accessibility in the development process, and suggests code improvements to catch bugs early in the development cycle. The solution combines AI, computer vision, and advanced algorithms to offer various services and solutions for different stages of development - from code, to QA, CI/DC processes, and finishing in production.

In a conversation with Geektime, Evinced co-Founder Gal Moav explains that its system scans a company's website, beginning by examining the standard user experience. The system then creates a model to run an accessibility-focused experience, including how the web page content is voiced to the user and then compares to the standard experience. The system examines every aspect of user-faced code. When asked what distinguishes Evinced from competitors, Moav said, "All existing automation solutions are based on syntax analysis, which in HTML, for example, is very limited. Our solution is based on user experience (UX), and from there, the code learns how to adapt the experience for users with disabilities."

According to Moav, the main motivation for funding projects like this has been regulation. "The driving engine is primarily regulation, like the WCAG, which sparked the best of companies to take accessibility seriously." [Source: Yaneev Avital, Geektime]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Microsoft invests in Evinced to make the internet accessible to all](https://www.geektime.com/microsoft-invests-in-israeli-startup-evinced-to-make-the-internet-accessible/)

<https://www.geektime.com/microsoft-invests-in-israeli-startup-evinced-to-make-the-internet-accessible/>

HOME HEALTH ASSISTANT

February 4, 2021 – Carisk Partners is a care coordination company serving insurers, government entities, self-insured plan sponsors, and other managed care organizations. It recently collaborated

with HandsFree Health to deliver a HIPAA compliant, voice-enabled home health assistant, an essential component of Carisk's "Pathways 2 Recovery" program. HandsFree Health is led by a team of former healthcare executives with over 150 years of experience and is considered by many as the benchmark for voice technology in healthcare. It created WellBe, a voice-enabled virtual health assistant platform designed to help people access their health and wellness resources by using their voice. The collaboration will allow people to contact their care team or access emergency services in a hands-free environment.

The WellBe device is HIPAA compliant for patient privacy and confidentiality. With smartphone integration, it complements the technology offerings provided through the existing Carisk mobile health application and allows Carisk clinicians to connect patients with resources and support tailored to each individual's biopsychosocial needs. The system enables and manages smart home devices, allowing for the hands-free control of their home's key aspects such as light bulbs and small appliances. Device features include medication and appointment reminders, and access to a health database ensuring patients, families, and caregivers get answers to their medical questions from reliable, evidence-based sources.

Carisk plans to launch the WellBe device in February 2021 in a pilot program for people with upper extremity injuries and limited function. "We are thrilled to partner with Carisk in delivering essential healthcare technology solutions to improve patient interactions that aid in recovery. We think this program highlights the need for advanced in-home health technologies like WellBe," says Mike Cardillo, Founder, CEO of HandsFree Health. [Source: Business Wire]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Carisk® and HandsFree Health™ Provide HIPAA Compliant Voice-Enabled Digital Health Assistant and Smart Home Technology Solution in Workers' Compensation: Improves Quality of Life and Patient Engagement](https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20210204005704/en/Carisk%C2%AE-and-HandsFree-Health%E2%84%A2-Provide-HIPAA-Compliant-Voice-Enabled-Digital-Health-Assistant-and-Smart-Home-Technology-Solution-in-Workers%E2%80%99-Compensation-Improves-Quality-of-Life-and-Patient-Engagement#.YB2V-kdezi0.twitter)

<https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20210204005704/en/Carisk%C2%AE-and-HandsFree-Health%E2%84%A2-Provide-HIPAA-Compliant-Voice-Enabled-Digital-Health-Assistant-and-Smart-Home-Technology-Solution-in-Workers%E2%80%99-Compensation-Improves-Quality-of-Life-and-Patient-Engagement#.YB2V-kdezi0.twitter>

ALASKA EXPANDS BROADBAND TO RURAL LOCATIONS

February 3, 2021 – In a year where access to internet connectivity became more important than ever, Alaska Communications expanded broadband service to more than 3,700 locations in Alaska's underserved areas. This expansion was funded in part through the FCC's Connect America Fund Phase II (CAF II) program. "The pandemic underscored just how critical the availability of affordable broadband service is for accessing work, education, healthcare, and staying connected with friends

and family,” said Bill Bishop, Alaska Communications president, and CEO. “We’re thankful for federal programs like CAF II, which support rural broadband delivery.” Once complete, the project will be the single largest affordable broadband deployment under any one program in Alaska. “Under the program, internet speeds are a minimum 10 Mbps download and 1 Mbps upload,” said Bishop. “However, we chose to deliver higher speeds, up to 50 Mbps download, 10 Mbps upload, whenever possible to deliver additional value to our customers.” [Source: Business Wire]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Alaska Communications Expands Broadband to Underserved Locations in Rural Alaska](#)

<https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20210203005239/en/>

LONDON UNIVERSITY CREATING ONLINE COURSE ON AI FOR ACCESSIBILITY

February 2, 2021 – Researchers from City, University of London, and Microsoft Research are developing an introductory series of online sessions on artificial intelligence (AI) for accessibility aimed at people who are blind and low vision aged 16 and above. The university is looking for low or no vision volunteers to give feedback on the initial sessions -- especially for ways to make them more engaging while being accessible to a wide range of people.

According to the university, AI is already helping people who are blind or have low vision. Smartphone apps that use AI can help users enter text without typing, navigate their environment, and recognize currency, text, and objects. For example, apps like Seeing AI use AI to automatically recognize things in pictures taken with a phone camera. However, while there are many online courses for sighted people to learn about AI, none focus on AI for accessibility. City University thinks it is high time to fill this gap.

The lecture series will focus on real-world examples and apps from AI for accessibility, core concepts, and processes in assistive technology AI, and ethical considerations when designing AI. The course will mainly be self-directed online, with the possibility of teacher-supported in-person learning. They are meant to be interactive and fun, with hands-on activities and quizzes. After completing the sessions, people who are blind or low vision will have a basic understanding of AI problems, including object, face, and speech recognition, and their use for improving accessibility. [Source: Robin Christopherson, Ability Net]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Help City University create an online course on AI for accessibility](#)

<https://abilitynet.org.uk/news-blogs/help-city-university-create-online-course-ai-accessibility>

UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI LANGUAGE INTERVENTION FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING

February 1, 2021 – Children who are deaf or hard of hearing often have persistent language delays despite early identification and interventions. Researchers at the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine designed a technology-assisted language intervention (TALI), which incorporates alternative communication technology to enhance language learning. They conducted a randomized clinical trial to evaluate the TALI's impact on spoken language outcomes in deaf or hard of hearing children. Forty-one children aged 3 to 12 years with mild to profound hearing loss were enrolled in the trial. Children were randomly assigned to receive the TALI or treatment as usual (TAU) (with no change in current care) and were followed for 24 weeks. Twenty-one children were assigned TALI, and 20 were assigned TAU. Over 24 weeks, children in the TALI group had significantly greater increases in the length of phrases they used to express themselves when compared with those in the TAU group. Similar findings were seen with conversational turn-taking and the number of different words spoken.

The authors concluded that providing visual support for language concepts that are typically challenging for DHH children to acquire allowed children to process and comprehend spoken language more fully. They believe that such strategies can mitigate persistent language delays to improve lifelong independence. [Source: Pediatrics, AAP News & Journals Gateway]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[A Technology-Assisted Language Intervention for Children Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing: A Randomized Clinical Trial](https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/147/2/e2020025734)

<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/147/2/e2020025734>

UPCOMING EVENTS

CSUN ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE

The 36th annual CSUN Assistive Technology Conference (CSUN 2020) is convening this week, March 6, 2021, through 14, 2021, virtually. CSUN is the largest international conference addressing topics regarding people with disabilities and assistive and accessible technologies. Conference topics typically pertain to the domains of education, employment and workplace, entertainment, independent living, law and policy, and transportation.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[36th Annual CSUN Assistive Technology Conference](https://www.csun.edu/cod)

<https://www.csun.edu/cod>

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE OF THE NEW ENGLAND REGION (USA)

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the Assistive Technology Conference of New England (ATCNE) to take a virtual format from November 2020 – May 2021. The upcoming sessions for this quarter include

- The Coaching Model: Not Bill's Playbook. How to do Distance with learners Who Won't Watch Your Screen (March 29)
- Fifty Ways to Extend Literacy Encounters with Everyday Technologies (April 6)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Assistive Technology Conference of New England](https://www.assistivetechologyconference.com/2020-presentations/)

<https://www.assistivetechologyconference.com/2020-presentations/>

TECHNOLOGY AND DISABILITY POLICY HIGHLIGHTS, FEBRUARY 2021

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The Technology and Disability Policy Highlights (TDPH) is a monthly newsletter that reports on national public policy events and tracks emerging issues of interest to individuals with disabilities, researchers, policymakers, industry, and advocacy professionals. The Wireless RERC is a research center that promotes universal access to wireless technologies and explores their innovative applications in addressing the needs, user experiences, and expectations of people with disabilities. For more information on the Wireless RERC, please visit our website at [<http://www.wirelessrerc.org>]. For further information on items summarized in this report, or if you have items of interest that you would like included in future editions, please contact this edition's editors Salimah LaForce [salimah@cacp.gatech.edu], Dara Bright [dara.bright@cacp.gatech.edu], or Anushri Kumar [anushrik@gatech.edu]. If you wish to update your email address, send an email to salimah@cacp.gatech.edu.

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